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Wait, NFL players eat how many Uncrustables?

Jayson Jenks
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485

Brock Purdy ate one at his locker before the Super Bowl. Andy Reid once offered them to his players as a reward. Before practice, during training camp and in the halftime locker room, they are a favorite of players across the NFL, a touch of childhood wrapped in plastic.

A few years ago *The Athletic* wrote about orange slices, the NFL's secret halftime snack (fun fact: teams are required to provide "three dozen sliced

oranges for halftime" for the visiting team). But in the course of reporting that story, many players said they passed on halftime citrus in favor of something else: Uncrustables, the sealed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches found in the frozen aisle of your local supermarket — and apparently permeating the NFL.

At the end of the 2023 season, *The Athletic* endeavored to find out just how many Uncrustables the league actually eats. And after convincing team employees that this was in fact a real question and not another scam message, most teams agreed to pony up their data from last year. A handful declined to participate, and a few others said they were PB&J purists who made their own sandwiches.

But based on the information collected, it's safe to say that NFL teams go through anywhere from 3,600 to 4,300 Uncrustables a week. When you factor in training camps and the teams that did not share their data, NFL teams easily go through *at least* 80,000 Uncrustables a year.

Weekly Uncrustable consumption across the NFL

DEN 700	SEA 320	JAX 315	MIA 300	ATL 250	NYG 240
PIT 225	ARI 200	MIN 200	LAC 200	BAL 150	WAS 140
CLE 120	CAR 100	TEN 100	CHI 100	IND 90	LAR 90

KC	DAL	TB	LV	CIN	NO
80	75	70	60	50	50

Note: 24 of 32 NFL teams provided The Athletic with approximate ranges for weekly Uncrustables eaten. The graphic represents the highest amount each team eats in a week.

= 10

Len Kretchman, a former wide receiver at North Dakota State, lived in the small town of Fergus Falls, Minn., and worked with schools in the food service industry. Sometime in the mid-90s, Len said, his wife, Emily, suggested he create a mass-produced peanut butter and jelly sandwich without the crust.

The project appealed to Len's business instinct: a simple idea with a complex logistical problem to solve. The Kretchmans started in their kitchen with a loaf of bread, one jar of peanut butter, one jar of jelly and a few drinks.

"We're not recreating the atomic bomb here," Len said. "We're trying to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich … It was two people standing there, goofing off, probably having a beer and a glass of wine and saying, 'What do you think of this?'"

The first decision they made was that the sandwich should be round.

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"The moon is round, the sun is round, the Earth is round, it's our favorite shape," Len said. "Do you have to go to a committee and survey people on what the shape should be? No. It's round. So we got that nailed down."

Secrets behind the NFL's favorite sandwich

Kitchen-counter to mass production

Founder Len Kretchman's wife, Emily, suggested commercializing the snack, which got its iconic round shape from initially being cut out using a drinking glass.

What's in a name?

The original name of the product, "The Incredible Uncrustable," was coined by an 11-year-old boy whose father was involved in the business.

Innovative technique

Putting the jelly in the middle and covering it with the peanut butter turned out to be the key to protecting the jelly from leaking.

Next, he grabbed a cup from his kitchen cabinet.

"If you asked moms how they (took the crust off a sandwich) 30 years ago, they'd say: 'I found a glass in my cupboard that was the right dimension and I pressed on the bread and I cut the crust off,'" Kretchman said. "And that's what we did!"

They added a crimp to the edges of the crustless bread, which was easy, but then had to figure out how to keep the jelly from oozing, which was not. Every time they thawed their creations, the jelly bled into the bread and ruined the sandwich. Much trial and error followed.

"We finally put the blob of jelly in the middle of the bread and then covered it with peanut butter and encased the jelly so it doesn't leach into the bread," Kretchman said. "That was key. That was our gee-whiz moment."

We're not recreating the atomic bomb here... we're trying to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

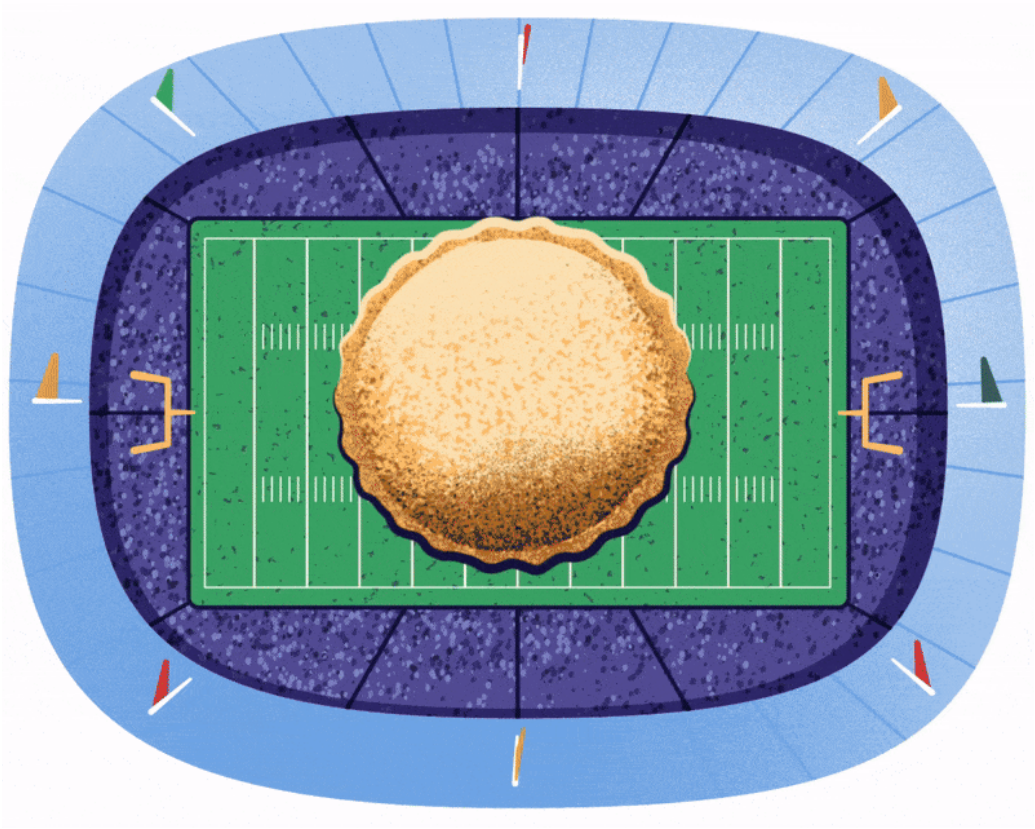
Len Kretchman
Co-inventor of Uncrustables

Len Kretchman, Co-inventor of Uncrustables

Kretchman and his business partner, David Geske, pitched their product to local schools. They needed a name. Once again, the idea landed in their kitchen. They asked the 11-year-old son of a business associate for a suggestion. His answer: The Incredible Uncrustable. Four years later, in 1999, Smuckers bought the company, dropped the first part of the name and introduced the country to the Uncrustable.

It took a little time, but the NFL wasn't far behind.

The Uncrustables eaten by the NFL in one year would cover over 18 yards of a football field



They weren't there when former Pro Bowl tight end Dallas Clark was drafted by the Indianapolis Colts in 2003. Of that much he's certain. But the moment this new treat joined the food ranks with "all that other healthy crap" the Colts provided? He can't really say.

All that he remembers is the feeling that something beautiful had happened.

"It's up there with the cell phone where you're like, 'How is this done?'"

Clark said. “When they came out it was like, ‘Duh, why did someone not think of this a looong time ago?'”

It was Jon Torine’s job to stock those snacks, “healthy crap” and all, for the Colts. And it was an especially important job during the week of the Super Bowl in 2007 when the Colts played the Chicago Bears in Miami. In the hotel ballroom where the team stayed, Torine, the Colts’ strength and conditioning coach at the time, laid out a spread for players to grab and go as they moved from meeting to meeting.

Jeff Saturday former Colts center

You could throw your playbook on top of ’em, didn’t make any difference. Squished, unsquished, you’re gonna crush it.

Jeff Saturday, former Colts center

“We were all scoopin’ and scorin’,” said Jeff Saturday, a center on that team. “We were grabbing five, six at a time.”

Clark, a player who struggled to keep on weight, would throw them in his backpack, unbothered by what would happen to them once there. “The Uncrustables always found their way to the bottom and got smashed by the playbook,” he said. “But still edible. Still in one compartment.”

“Didn’t matter,” Saturday said. “You could throw your playbook on top of ’em, didn’t make any difference. Squished, unsquished, you’re gonna crush it.”

They are now a staple for many NFL teams. San Francisco 49ers tight end George Kittle eats two on flights to road games and anywhere from two to four on flights home. Chiefs defensive end Mike Danna eats them at the team facility and at home. Ravens kicker Justin Tucker grabs one from the snack table on his way to meetings. Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce claimed on his podcast that he eats more of them than “anything else in the world.”

“We’re all creatures of habit, dude,” Saturday said. “Almost freakishly. If you’re a two-Uncrustables-a-day kind of guy, that’s just what you do.”

Each week, the NFL consumes nearly the weight of three Travis Kelces in Uncrustables

Torine and most nutritionists wouldn't recommend frozen, processed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches as their No. 1 healthy snack option for players. But Uncrustables can do the job, especially when time is limited, and even nutritionists at the highest level of sports performance make compromises.

The bread and jelly give players quick carbohydrates. The peanut butter provides a little fat and a little protein. They're easy to digest, convenient to eat and a comfort food that players love (though there is wide disagreement as to whether grape or strawberry is the better jelly flavor — the correct answer is strawberry).

In fact, the Colts also ate Uncrustables at halftime of Super Bowl XLI, when they beat the Bears 29-17.

"So maybe that was the difference," Torine said, laughing.

Credits

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Jayson Jenks is a features writer for The Athletic based in Kansas City. Before joining The Athletic, he covered the Seattle Seahawks for The Seattle Times. Follow Jayson on Twitter **@JaysonJenks**

COMMENTS

J Joseph Y. · Oct 24, 2024

Obscure, fun story and a really good read. My favorite part? Now I don't feel so bad about having a couple uncrustables during the day

W Wes K. · Oct 24, 2024

Kudos to the graphics team on this one 👏

M Matthew A. · Oct 24, 2024

I really enjoyed most of this silly,lighthearted article. Then you go and RUIN the PB&J sandwich by putting strawberry jelly on it. It's a PB&J, man.

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